

Dear Representative Luxenberg, Senator Moore, and members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Bryan Chong. I am a resident of New Britain and a member of the Cap the Rent campaign.

I am testifying in support of a rent cap and in support, with changes, of SB 4. The rent cap ought to be 2.5% – which tracks pre-pandemic average rent increases, be in effect during lease transitions so landlords can't push out tenants to increase the rent, and include good cause eviction protections.

I was born and raised in Hong Kong, and came to Connecticut nearly 9 years ago as an international student – graduating from Kent School and Wesleyan University. While many Americans are familiar with Hong Kong's struggle for democracy, folks may not realize that Hong Kong has, since 1997, been consistently ranked as one of the freest economies in the world – and despite recent political turmoil, Hong Kong was still in fact the freest economy in the world in 2022, according to the Fraser Institute.

Similar to Connecticut, Hong Kong's housing and rental system is in deep crisis. Tenants in both places – many of whom are young job-seekers, fresh out of college like myself – are unable to afford rising rents, as wages remain stagnant and rental conditions worsen and rental units fall into disrepair. In Hong Kong – again, the freest economy in the world – I watched throughout my entire life as this free market system has culminated in the widespread phenomenon of **“cage homes and coffin homes,”** named after rental units literally no larger than a coffin, structured as cages to offer tenants bare minimum security. These homes are illegally subdivided by “housing providers,” are deeply inhumane – and most importantly, are a direct result of a system where corporate “housing providers” are given free rein to maximize profit out of basic human needs. I have seen this happen over the course of my entire life in Hong Kong, the freest economy in the world – so I can see with my own eyes that with increasing rents for decreasing unit sizes, Connecticut is headed in the same direction.

On a more personal note, I am rare among Wesleyan University students in that I chose to remain here in Connecticut after I graduated, unlike many others who moved to New York or Massachusetts. Over the last decade, I have found and made a home here with wonderful, compassionate people who have shown me the utmost hospitality and welcome over the last nine years. This hospitality has driven me to work as an organizer for various campaigns supporting working families all over Connecticut – in fact, I had the utmost pleasure of poll-standing with Rep. Scott and his mother-in-law last November, despite being on opposite sides. It saddens me that many Connecticut college graduates leave this state and its beautiful and vibrant people. With a rent cap and good cause eviction protections, we can give Connecticut college graduates a greater incentive to stay here, to find stability and community, to contribute to our economy and society in the many great ways we are educating them to do.

After nine years, I am proud to call myself a Nutmegger. I came to Connecticut in search of a better life, a more hopeful destiny. Organizing for this bill is part of my way to help realize this destiny, and to express gratitude to a state whose working people have taught me the value of solidarity, the value of staying rooted in community. With a rent cap and good cause eviction protections, myself and many others will be able to continue championing the values of love and solidarity in Connecticut.

Sincerely,
Bryan Chong
New Britain